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## Welcoming address

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## WELCOMING ADDRESS

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to say a few words at the opening of the IATUL conference. I'm doing so on behalf of the board of the University of Twente.

We are proud to have this prestigious conference of librarians here at Enschede.

When going through the programme of this conference, one gets the impression that your points of interest fit very well in the way of thinking of this university.

Our university is concerned both with technical and social sciences and in both fields teaching and research are directed towards fields of application where possible with a social relevance. Interaction between social sciences and engineering is pursued.

The special position of nowadays libraries seems in more than one way related to the position of a university where engineering, and the technology stemming from it, interacts with existing fields of humanities and social sciences. Different cultures of science in a differing phase of development are interacting because of social forces.

Culture that has been preserved by books for many centuries finds itself supported by a new infrastructure of fast-developing technologies. The steady development of

libraries and library science is in competition with the hectic development of computer science and information carrying networks.

One is not even sure these days that the well-known statement of the French poet Mallarmé will survive. Mallarmé wrote about a century ago, "Tout aboutit en un livre". Everything ends in a book. The end of books might be described in another medium as optimistic engineers would suppose.

Engineers, however, have to admit that the life of information contained by clay tablets, papyrus or books lasts much longer than the life of information in magnetic or optical media. It is curious that the life of information is described by the Deborah-number, the concept of which is deduced from the book of Deborah where prophesy is found on rocks that crumble before the eyes of the Lord. The concept of a book might survive for such technical reasons according to others, and I would like to support that there are also psychological reasons to prefer a book above other media.

As Groucho Marx remarked: "Outside of a dog a book is man's best friend, inside a dog it is too dark for reading".

I wish you a fruitful conference and a pleasant stay in Enschede.